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ABSTRACT

This case study researched how two Joliet, Illinois, Corsini 4R (C4R) magnet schools function for the purpose of measuring their effectiveness as an alternative learning paradigm to public school education. In C4R schools, students learn the four R's: Responsibility, Respect, Reasourcefulness and Responsiveness. Data generated from classroom observations and informal interviews with counselors, administrators, and teachers, and classroom observations support Blank's (1984) three generalizations about effective magnet schools: administrative flexibility, commitment to theme, and strong leadership from principals. The data also shows a fit between the C4R approach and the magnet school approach. In addition, the research confirms that the C4R approach is an effective way of monitoring and encouraging learning. (JAM)

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A CASE STUDY OF TWO CORSINI 4R MAGNET SCHOOLS

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CASE STUDY OF TWO CORSINI 4R MAGNET SCHOOLS

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Background of the Study

Curious and happy school children are too rare in these United States, the land of the free. Ray Corsini (1979), an Adlerian psychologist, found that an authoritarian, prison-like school climate prevails to stifle the child's real initiative to learn. He began Corsini 4R (C4R) schools where children learn the four R's - Responsibility, Respect, Resourcefulness and Responsiveness. The result is children who choose to learn because they enjoy learning.

Several unusual features are evident in the C4R schools. Children study the curriculum in their own way by going to class, by the help of peers, by personal study, or by studying at home. They go to class if they choose to go. Teachers use the "Go" signal to dismiss disruptive students so that the class period includes 100% teaching time. Teachers double as teacher-advisors who spend time learning the real personalities of their students in group activities and individual counseling sessions. The school day is divided into three components - academic, creative, and social - because the students' self-motivation causes an intensity and efficiency unmatched in traditional schools (Corsini, 1977; Manchester and Corsini, 1982).

This is a study of how the C4R schools function as magnet schools. Magnet schools are characterized by several unique features.

In a federally funded two year study of magnet schools, Blank (1984) found that high quality magnet schools have characteristics in common even though individual uniqueness is one reason for their existence. These characteristics are 1) a strong, innovative "entrepreneurial" principal; 2) a highly coherent theme which can focus the curriculum, teaching methods, and staff capabilities; and 3) some degree of special treatment or flexibility with regard to district rules, conventions, and procedures. He also found that voluntary enrollment in magnet schools affect educational quality through higher attendance rates, fewer behavior problems, and lower suspension and drop-out rates.

Magnet schools have evolved beyond their original purpose of providing for voluntary desegregation to offer educational innovations attractive to parents (Prince, 1988; Metz, 1984). Doyle and Levine (1984) contrasted the lack of depth and intensity of Conant's comprehensive neighborhood high school with the more focused curriculum of the magnet school. This curriculum is often an innovative approach to schooling or an emphasis on selected subject matter. They wrote, "Public magnet schools serve some of the same functions as private schools, but they do so within the public sector. More important, they contain within themselves the seeds of systemwide improvement."

Metz (1984) found that magnet schools radically change the basis of access to superior schools. She described ways that schools are organized from within, and the political processes which influence schools are so constructed that real change in education is difficult to effect. The magnet school has upset the balance of these rigid, controlling forces so that positive changes have been possible where magnet schools have been used.

The role of parents has been much discussed in the literature. Tsapatsaris (1985) described how Lowell, Massachusetts, formed a parent problem-solving group which traveled over the country looking at various schools to solve the problems of their schools. This group decided that magnet schools could lead their system out of minority isolation. As a result of parent study, approximately one third of the children in the Lowell school system are in various magnet schools, each of which is built around a single theme. Some of the themes included are micro-society curriculum, arts, back to basics, continuous progress, and computers and technology (K-3). Clinchy (1985) argues that parents can choose the kind and quality of education they want for their children in magnet schools. They have a feeling of control over their children's educational lives. Several writers report that magnet schools improve the school system's image in the community as a result of voluntary enrollment policies.

Purpose and Method of the Study

I began the study of C4R schools in 1984 (Clark, 1985). The

study included a review of Adlerian psychology, communication and visits with Ray Corsini, and several trips to two private IE schools in Florida, the Sunwood School in Melbourne and the New Life Academy in Titusville. I then visited the two public schools, Forest Park Elementary School and Hufford Junior High School in Joliet, Illinois, which are the focus of this study. Forest Park and a school-within-a-school at Hufford Junior High are C4R schools and magnet schools.

This study asks the question, Does the C4R school approach, which began in private schools, work effectively as public magnet schools? The case study is a study of two C4R schools which have been magnet schools for several years. It is organized so that it presents the data related to Blank's (1984) three generalizations about effective magnet schools: administrative flexibility, commitment to a theme, and strong leadership from principals.

Discussion

Flexibility of the Joliet Schools

Dr. Corsini, the founder of C4R, told of the feeling of the need for magnet schools on the part of the superintendent of the Joliet Schools, his almost accidental learning of the C4R system in the informal atmosphere of a golf game, and the beginning of the two C4R magnet schools. Although the superintendent has changed since the beginning of the program, there continues to be a commitment to the C4R system (Joliet schools continue to use the older name - Individual Education or IE) on the part of the

school board and administration. The leaders of both schools described good voluntary enrollment and the growth of this enrollment since their beginnings. The principals described an early purpose of voluntary desegregation in the minds of school leaders for both schools. As magnet schools have evolved, so these schools have evolved, so that nicely desegregated student populations have moved into the C4R schooling approach without consciously thinking about desegregation any longer.

Academic Curriculum

Some flexibility to allow the C4R approach seems to have been present from the beginning. Academic classes are built around units which follow carefully prepared outlines. Hufford has printed units which they continue to revise so that students can have them as guides to their learning and they can have options as to how they will learn this material. Forest Park teachers have similar material in filing cabinets which are accessible to students.

A Forest Park teacher, whom everyone acknowledged to be more experienced in the IE approach and a leader among teachers both as a counselor and a model of IE strategy, had a large class. This was an indication of his ability because students go to classes voluntarily. Students were in the closet and in extra chairs around the room. The teacher was teaching a lesson to a majority of the class, but there were several sub-classes around the room busily talking about subject matter with some intensity. The noise level seemed rather high, even to being some competi-

tion for the teacher, but neither the teacher nor the students seemed to be disturbed by this noise level.

A new teacher in the primary grades discussed her learning about the IE approach. Even though she had been in the system at Forest Park for only a year, she performed like an experienced C4R teacher. The slightly higher noise level was welcome to her as a new teacher because she thought this allowed the kind of sharing between students and teacher which could result in greater learning. A student in the back of the class appeared to have opted for non-participation that day, which is not unusual in C4R. In careful whispered tones, he offered to read to me. He read well but had some word attack problems which he evidently was striving to correct.

A science class at Hufford was doing a science experiment which involved the students' making their own phonographs. The interest and involvement was high. The varied ability of the class was a challenge to the teacher so that there was high participation in the activity.

Creative Curriculum

Corsini 4R schools have as much as a third of the day devoted to creative classes. Topics are chosen by teachers and students and presented by community persons, by teachers, or even by students. An enthusiastic teacher at Hufford had two students doing a creative class. Interest was high in the group. The deputy principal said that this teacher talked him into being in

the school yard participating in an astronomy unit during a special meeting of a creative class at 4 o'clock one morning.

Hufford is a school-within-a-school so that there is a larger component of the school which is traditional. Teachers from the traditional component teach creative classes in the IE school. This practice helps traditional teachers to become acquainted with the IE program so that there is healthy communication between the two schools. The IE school-within-a-school has the advantage of allowing its students to participate in larger programs in athletics, orchestra, and band.

During the lunch hour, an attractive blonde seventh grade girl told me that she preferred the traditional school over the IE school. She had heard that they were having fun and games in the IE school to the extent that some of the students were doing the teaching.

Forest Park teachers described creative classes as being hands-on activity-oriented classes. These classes included creative writing, finger painting, and manipulating science equipment. On the other hand, a creative algebra class has been successful in the Forest Park school. The principal said that parents do not work well as teachers of creative classes because they cannot seem to make the daily commitment to teaching.

Social Curriculum

A part of the C4R social curriculum is the homeroom which lasts for 40 minutes at Forest Park and 45 minutes at Hufford. The teacher had a class meeting to decide whether or not I could

come into the homeroom. After a great deal of discussion, while the principal and the visitor both waited outside the door, the students reluctantly decided to allow the visitor to come into the homeroom. Several of the students had planned to go to the gymnasium from the homeroom and they thought I might hinder their ball game.

The "Go" signal allows teachers of the academic classes and the creative classes to have much control over the classes. When the teacher points to the student and then to the door, the student must leave immediately without argument. He or she can come back or can opt to go to another place. Students usually come back immediately. The teacher can use the "Go" signal without disrupting the lecture or discussion. The student's disruption is broken and seemingly without any negative affect from the student. The homeroom has no "Go" signal.

In the homeroom teachers and students are equal. A basic principle of the C4R schools is this equality between teachers and students. This deliberate equality of status in the homeroom is designed to raise the initiative and responsibility of the students. Joliet teachers believe that students may take advantage of some teacher vulnerability during the homeroom. They describe teachers who have special difficulty because they come from a traditional background and are more rigid in their approach to interaction with children. The Hufford deputy principal described such a teacher who worked through his homeroom

difficulties and experienced some real growth as a teacher and communicator as a result of this experience.

The Forest Park principal described a teacher who could not adjust to the homeroom. Students sent her insulting, humiliating gifts. He finally said to her, "We need to talk about whether or not you want the homeroom to work. Perhaps unconsciously you want to get out of this IE assignment." Her homeroom dwindled from 28 to 11. She did not have many in her creative classes. At the end of the year, she did leave the IE school.

The three curricula of the C4R school demand flexibility on the part of both the system administration and the school principal. The Hufford deputy principal described his personal adjustment to the plan. He said that after two years he was becoming adjusted and committed to the program.

Commitment to the Theme

I heard a great deal of discussion in interviews with administrators and teachers about commitment to the purity of the C4R theory in their school practice. Corsini has written to me about his concern that perhaps C4R principles may erode as the years pass and traditionally trained teachers may remember their former practice in schools other than in C4R schools. However, both in formal settings, such as faculty meetings, and in informal interviews, administrators and teachers expressed great concern that they are implementing the pure C4R theory.

The Forest Park librarian discussed a period in which the faculty carried on endless questioning and dialog about whether or not their practice was true to the pure C4R theory. The librarian said that the present experienced IE principal, who has been in place for over a year at Forest Park, is able to speak authoritatively about IE so that teachers feel satisfied that they are correct in their practice.

This same interest in the magnet school theme was expressed in interviews with two teachers at Hufford. One interview was with the head teacher who expressed some confidence that their IE practice was of high quality. The other teacher described with some intensity her commitment to the C4R theory and her desire to have the Hufford school be a true IE school. The same tone was expressed by the faculty group in a Hufford faculty meeting. They discussed at some length the characteristics of both the school and the students and the waiting list of students who are anxious to profit from the IE approach to learning.

Principals of the C4R Schools

The first principal of Forest Park was apparently the leader of C4R in the community. He had special training as a C4R principal, spending a period of time in Hawaii with Corsini. He wrote about the beginning of the Forest Park magnet school. "I applied with a number of others, was interviewed extensively, and in December of 1977 I was selected as the principal of the world's first public Individual Education school." (Dubrovich,

1985). He wrote of the simplicity, effectiveness, and potential of Individual Education for other communities in the nation. He summarized the results which he had seen.

Academics. When we began our project in 1978, Forest Part School had consistently ranked last out of twenty-two elementary schools in our district in reading and math achievement. Today, operating with a normal selection of children from across the city who are not screened in any way, we are ranked in the top three. And we spend only a total of two hours and forty-five minutes a day on formal academic studies!

Discipline. When we started, I was seeing in September 1978 an average of thirty-one students a day with disciplinary referrals. All these students had come from traditional schools. Today I average about three students a day out of a total of three hundred students - from about 10 percent of students down to 1 percent. This is due in part to our greater confidence in ourselves and in firmly retaining the unique disciplinary system of Individual Education.

Creative. During the past seven years literally hundreds of creative class offerings have allowed our students to gain new understandings, discover talents that they did not know they had, and foster appreciation of literature, fine arts, physical education, life skills, and more. Results have included higher levels of motivation for learning academic skills and a willingness on the part of students to take risks, experiment, and try their hands at something new. (Dubrovich, 1985, p. 84).

The present Forest Park principal was the original Hufford IE principal. Hufford has a principal for the whole school, but a deputy principal is responsible for the school-within-a-school. He was actually trained by the first Forest Park principal who served as consultant to the Hufford program which started in 1981 (Poch, 1985). The Forest Park principal is poised and respected by both the Hufford faculty and the Forest Park faculty. He is considered an authority on the IE system.

The Hufford school has at least five persons to perform the role of the principal. The first of these is the deputy principal who is beginning his third year with the IE school. As an illustration of his appreciation of the effect of IE, he spoke of the joy that IE students show in the lunch room and on the playground. He described the difference between the manners and general respect for one another which IE students show. The second is a head teacher who led the faculty meeting of IE teachers which I observed. Although he teaches all day, he seems to have quite a leadership role in the magnet school. He describes an excellent relationship with the deputy principal, especially his resourcefulness and thoughtfulness.

Three school counselors make up the remaining members of the administrative team. They are in charge of the IE discipline program which is largely responsible for the orderliness of the IE school. The original deputy principal had all of the responsibility which these five share at this time. I found that the present administrative arrangement works well in spite of the change.

The commitment, the resourcefulness, and the leadership skill of the Joliet principals qualify them for high marks in leadership. As evidence of this quality leadership, teachers described their enjoyment of the C4R program. One teacher remembered Forest Park before it became a magnet school. One characteristic of the IE school which she especially likes is the ability to teach academic classes at the primary level and crea-

tive classes at the intermediate level. She says that working with different age children is stimulating to her.

Conclusion

I have described observations and interviews which support the presence in the Joliet Individual Education schools of the three characteristics of excellent magnet schools. First, the administrative flexibility of the schools is evident in their different approach to curriculum and classroom management. Second, commitment to the C4R approach is expressed enthusiastically by administrators and teachers of both Forest Park and Huford. The C4R approach is the focus of the curriculum, teaching methods, and staff capabilities. Third, the principals of the Joliet schools are strong persons, capable of leadership and maintenance of the C4R program.

The data shows an excellent fit between the C4R approach and the magnet school approach. Even the search of the literature reveals a surprising correspondence between the theories of C4R and the definition of magnet schools. My observation of the schools confirm that the C4R approach is an effective way to monitor and encourage the learning of children and that this approach does work in the magnet school setting.

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